

FORGOTTEN FLORA

A CREATIVE PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE MASTER OF FINE ARTS

BY

REANNA MILLER

JAMES BEANE – ADVISOR

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

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## ABSTRACT

**CREATIVE PROJECT:** *Forgotten Flora*

**STUDENT:** Reanna Miller

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**PAGES:** 30

My short film deals with the themes of a simple life versus a complex life and nature versus technology. The nature versus technology aspect goes hand-in-hand with how I view my work and life. As a two-dimensional animator, I am accustomed to stress. I have realized stepping away from my work, and consequently technology, allows me to enjoy other aspects of my life, such as spending time with friends and family. To me, moments such as these represent the simple life, which I portray through nature, specifically a strange plant, in *Forgotten Flora*. Megan, the main character in *Forgotten Flora*, finds a plant on her doorstep, a gift from her parents. As the plant grows, it begins causing mayhem to Megan's day-to-day activities, thus offsetting the balance of her life. The plant's growth equates to Megan's stress, which is considerable given her Type A personality. She is prone to excessive hard work and overachievement, and I represent her lifestyle through the decoration and organization in her chic, high-tech apartment. Unfortunately, instead of her apartment being a haven away from her stress, it is connected directly to her phone, which serves as a focus of the stress in her life. Many young people fall into this kind of lifestyle. People in my age group suffer from false pressures of achieving something great as soon as they become adults. This is why Megan is an overachiever; she has unnecessarily set excessively high standards for herself.

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## LIST OF IMAGES

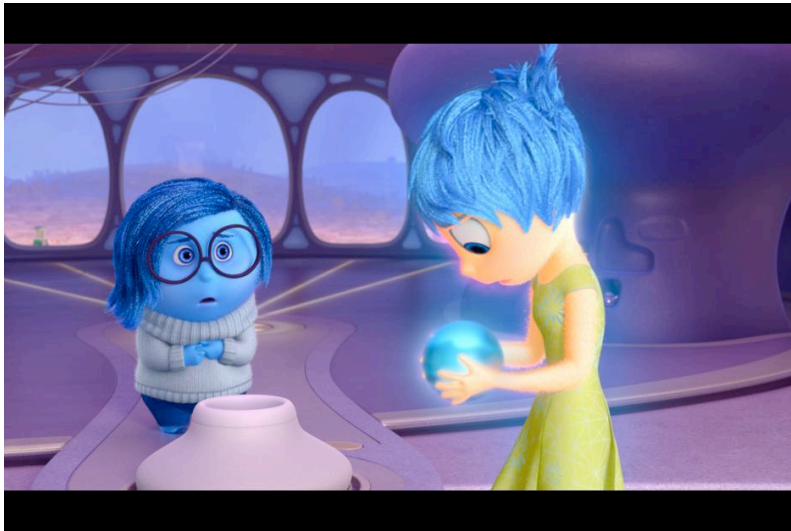


Figure 1. *Inside Out*, Directed by Pete Docter and Ronnie Del Carmen. Pixar Animation Studios. 2015, Digital Image. From: Internet Movie Database, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2096673/> (accessed December 7, 2016).



Figure 2. Clara Horst, “Erika and Anju.” 2016, Digital Image. From: Vimeo, <https://vimeo.com/163963840> (accessed December 7, 2016).



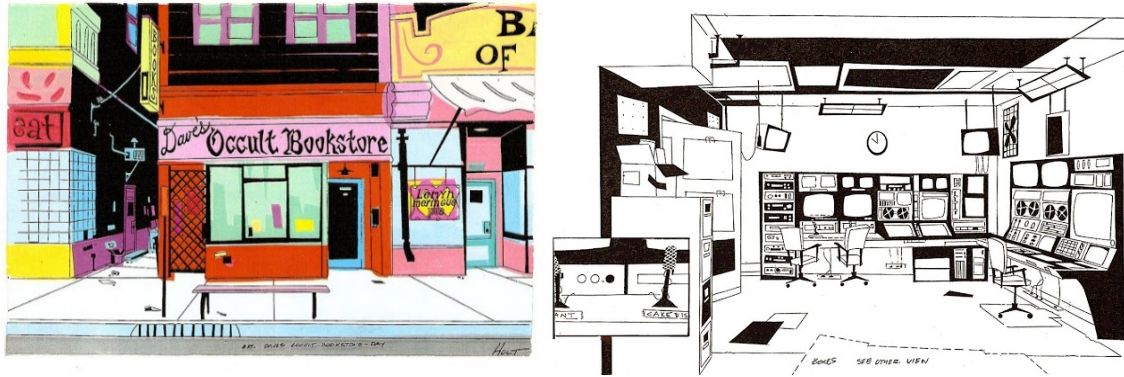


Figure 3. Joseph Holt, “Mission Hill Backgrounds.” 1999, Digital Image. From: Joseph Holt Blog, <http://jholtmissionhill.blogspot.com/> (accessed October 14, 2016).

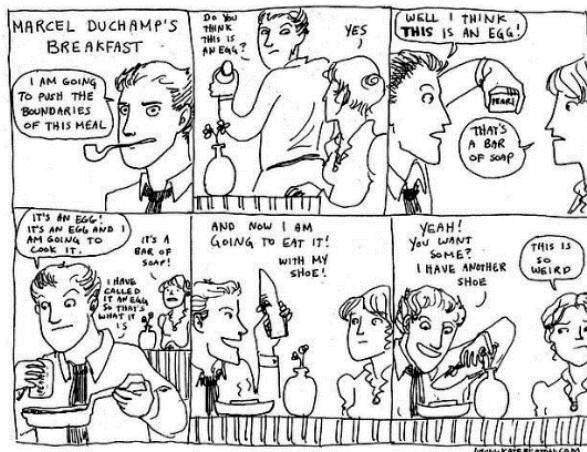


Figure 4. Kate Beaton, “Marcel Duchamp’s Breakfast.” 2006, Digital Image. From: Hark, a Vagrant, <http://www.harkavagrant.com/index.php?id=1> (accessed October 14, 2016).



Figure 5. De Alice Bissonnet, Aloyse Desoubries Binet, Sandrine Hanji Kuang, Juliette Laurent, and Sophie Markatatos, “In Between.” 2012, Digital Image. From: YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2xp22IYL2uU> (access November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016).

## IMAGES FROM “FORGOTTEN FLORA”



Figure 6.

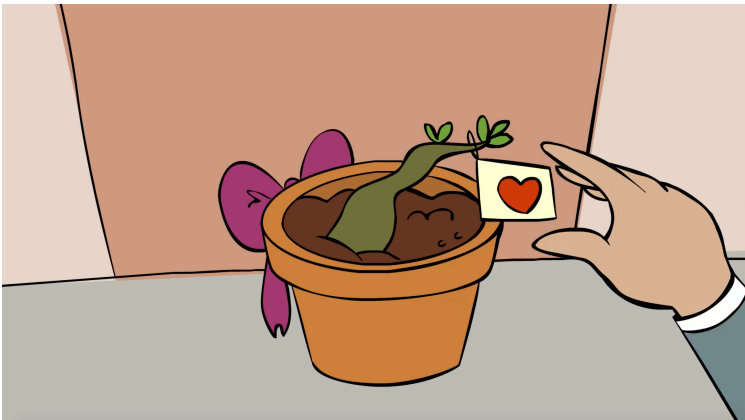


Figure 7.



Figure 8.

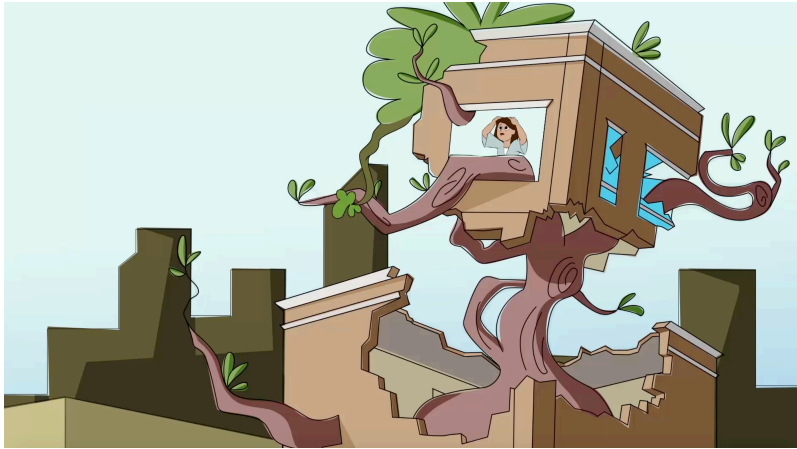


Figure 9.

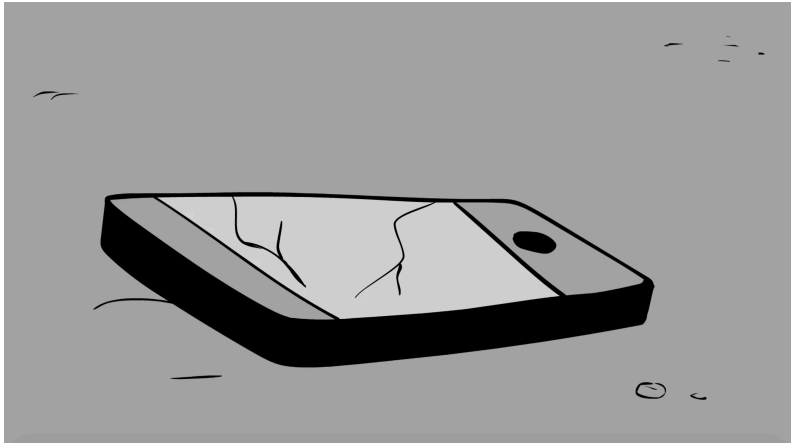


Figure 10.



Figure 11.



Figure 12.



Figure 13.

## DESCRIPTION OF IMAGES

Figure 1. Joy looks at a memory orb with Sadness from *Inside Out* while they try to find their way out of Riley's maze of long-term memories.

Figure 2. Erika from "Erika and Anju" cleans Anju's head wound after Anju hit herself in her head with a flag.

Figure 3. Joseph Holt's background of the Occult Bookstore from *Mission Hill*, a favorite stop for the main character, Andy.

Figure 4. Another background of a control room by Joseph Holt for *Mission Hill*.

Figure 5. The main character of "In Between" struggling with her anxiety, personified as an alligator, in front of her apartment's balcony.

Figure 6. Megan from "Forgotten Flora" sitting at her office desk, tirelessly working at night.

Figure 7. Megan finds a plant in front of her apartment door, a gift from her parents.

Figure 8. A picture Megan keeps on her shelf of herself as a little girl, harkening back to a time when she was less stressed.

Figure 9. The apartment is uprooted into the sky by the plant since it became overgrown and out of control.

Figure 10. The plant takes Megan's phone, drops it, thus breaking it into many pieces.

Figure 11. Megan hangs thousands of feet in the air from her apartment window, swinging on a vine.

Figure 12. Megan falls, but catches herself on another vine, and begins to swing back and forth as if she is on a swing set.

Figure 13. Megan heads out of the office at a decent time to spend the evening with her parents. Megan accepts a new outlook on life, one with less stress, and a new plant-plentiful office.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Megan, the highly stressed young woman of *Forgotten Flora*, represents people of the Millennial Generation and Generation Y. While I believe all generations are attracted to social media and technology, I know my own generation and others have been immersed in technology since a very young age. We get most of our information online, we schedule our lives with calendar applications, we communicate through various social media, just to name a few examples. Another interesting aspect of the Millennial Generation are the technological advances that have occurred throughout the 1980s and 1990s, making this generation much more reliant on technology. In their study, Pearson, Carmon, Tobola, and Fowler state “technology is integral” to the Millennial Generation, specifically college students.<sup>1</sup> They argue the availability and use of technology in college settings pushes Millennial students to integrate various devices, such as computers and cellphones, into their daily lives to a greater degree. Results differ based on students’ socio-psychological mannerisms. Millennials also use technology on a much more intimate and personal level than the past, since social media acts as a digital photo album and timeline of their lives. Megan’s apartment in *Forgotten Flora* is high-tech in that everything in her apartment is controlled through an app on her phone, such as turning on lights, opening her curtains, and controlling the music on her stereo system. Megan’s situation is not meant to shame my generation for their technological use, but rather to highlight how over-reliance on technology can be detrimental. Technology and social media aid our lives, but these things easily over-complicate our lives as well.

As an artist, I wanted to create an animated film that examines why too much distraction in the form of technology causes anxiety. I wanted to study what it means to have a simple life

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<sup>1</sup> Judy C. Pearson, et al., “Motives for Communication: Why the Millennial Generation Uses Electronic Devices,” *Journal of the Communication, Speech and Theatre Association of North Dakota* 22 (2009/2010): 60.

and how a life filled with technology can be more complicated and stressful. I love to animate, but spending too much time in front of a computer monitor causes strain physically and mentally. This over-usage may be a result of avoiding deeper issues, such as depression, anxiety, and other mental illnesses. Based on the Pearson, Carmon, Tobola, and Fowler study, students who are more confident in their social interactions tend to use technology in ways to aid their relationships via cellphones. Students who suffer from social anxiety isolate themselves with computers, increasing the feeling they do not belong in normal social interactions.<sup>2</sup> I know I am not alone, and I know every generation has experienced different hassles specific to each time period. When I was young, I remember the panic at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century over Y2K as the earliest anxiety I felt toward computers and other devices. I deal with technology on a daily basis. My work revolves around using technology, and consequently my life is intertwined with it. Most of the time technology helps me in my daily tasks such as animating, but it starts to become detrimental for me when both my professional and social life is consumed and dictated by it. My extracurricular activities and personal relationships begin to suffer if I do not consistently address my over-reliance on technology.

Though 2D animation is my preferred medium as an artist, staying abreast of the software I use to create my digital animations (programs such as Toon Boom or Adobe Animate) present constant challenges. As I seek to give my films a compelling and relatable narrative, I can become even more immersed in the stress technological dependence can create. Though these 2D animated programs have given me the ability to fully control the look of my film from pre-production to post-production, and are integral to my work as an artist, they are a source of anxiety.

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<sup>2</sup> Pearson, et al., "Motives for Communication," 59.



Another aspect of my film's theme is the frustration my generation has towards technology. Some would say my generation is in love with technology, but this is not always the case. The main character of my story, Megan, must deal with the anxiety caused by the pressure of taking on too much responsibility and not allowing herself time to grow, a typical problem faced by her generation. Megan must deal with this on a personal level; as the narrative implies she has not seen her family in quite some time, and always comes home late from work and goes straight to bed. Megan's life is over-complicated due to overbearing demands from work and she does not allow herself time to relax or "smell the roses." Time away from the stressors of work and enjoying creative endeavors are just as important as the work itself. Free time allows a person to reflect on and enjoy the benefits of their creative endeavors. Rather than being lazy, setting aside free time actually allows a person to grow. Often my generation does not set aside time for this. However, what is this hard work worth without personal reflection? If after all the hard work is done, what point is there to moving onto another task without reflecting upon this work?

These are the questions Megan must confront. I have symbolically represented these questions and stresses through the intense growth of the plant. Megan takes on too much work and never allows herself a break. Because she is so busy and unreachable, her parents leave a small plant in front of her apartment door. As Megan continues to allow the technology-driven stresses in her life to cause her anxiety, the plant begins to grow out of control, feeding off Megan's stress like food.

Megan's life relies on technology in order for her to function throughout the day; rather than simplifying, the technology only further complicates her life. Because the technology muddles and strains her further by controlling everything in her apartment, such as her curtains,

alarm clock, and her stereo, for example. I have also attempted to show how, like many young people, Megan is struggling with overwork and being underpaid. Like many of her generation, Megan overworks herself as she feels this is necessary to her success. Consequently, Megan forgets to include the important things in her life, such as spending time with family. All of this directly reflects my own experiences as a young professional and as a graduate student. Megan embodies my own experiences, where, as I accepted responsibility the resultant stress lead to health issues.

Ultimately, I want my audience to think on what overbearing tasks and responsibilities they have in their life. I would like them to assess what they can do to live a less stressful life, because many people take on too much responsibility, due to the natural human assumption that working hard equals more success. Many people do not realize when too much work is too much. I want my audience to connect with Megan in a way in which they can see themselves in her, just as I did. My message to the audience is that more time for recreation and fun can lead to more success in life. Finding a way to step away from the unnecessary tensions in life, such as the over-reliance on technology, can lead to a healthier outlook and even mental growth.

As Megan piles on more and more work for herself, the plant in her apartment starts to take over all of her living space. The overgrown plant acts as an abrupt reminder that Megan has forgotten to give her life a dose of tender, love, and care. I believe a simpler approach to life helps human beings cope with day-to-day pressures. The plant is a present from her parents, acting as a reminder that she ignores the social aspect of her life. This gesture moves her, but she begins to neglect even this living thing. As the plant starts to outgrow its welcome, it begins to destroy aspects of her stressed life. Megan at first does not realize this until it forces her out of her routine. Megan has become accustomed to her busy life as a normal form of achievement and

success. Sadly, she does not realize this tense life is taking a toll on her. The plant takes on a human quality when it seems to purposefully forcing her to realize this is happening. The plant's growth drives the narrative; as the plant grows, Megan's life becomes less troubled. We can see this in how Megan allows herself to be a pushover when it comes to taking on too much responsibility. The plant obstructs this action by stealing her phone and breaking it. Megan at first is distraught, but she begins to quickly realize this is all to help her take on less stress, thus simplifying her life.

## REVIEW OF INFLUENCES

Other films have used narrative, animation, and anxiety. The short film *In Between* by De Alice Bissonnet, Aloyse Desoubries Binet, Sandrine Hanji Kuang, Juliette Laurent, and Sophie Markatatos, follows a young, independent woman living in a city who experiences anxiety and depression, which are personified as an alligator. This alligator follows her everywhere, from her job to the grocery store. The young woman desperately wants to talk to her neighbor next door, but every time she attempts anything social, the alligator stops her physically. She confronts it, telling it to go away. It becomes sad, but accepts that she needs her space. Finally, the young woman is able to talk with her neighbor. The alligator is a reminder that while one not be able to get rid of a mental obstacle, one can still move forward by recognizing and confronting one's fears.<sup>3</sup> Megan in *Forgotten Flora* must cope with the plant's growth as a direct result of stress, ultimately accepting it as a part of her life but changing her life for the better. Megan uprooted apartment, which looks similar to a tree house, shows her

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<sup>3</sup> De Alice Bissonnet et al., "In Between" (video), posted September 4, 2012, accessed November 6, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2xp22IYL2uU>.

acceptance of her new, less complex life. *Forgotten Flora* differs from *In Between* with the characters and personified elements. I address an over complex life, while *In Between* examines directly how anxiety can impede life. While *In Between* uses an alligator to personify mental obstacles, *Forgotten Flora* uses a plant. *In Between* shows how one can manage tension by addressing it head on, while my film addresses the repercussions of pushing off one's problems until they fester into a bigger problem, as shown with the plant overtaking Megan's apartment. Megan is also extremely successful, and her anxiety has not impeded all of her life, while the main character of *In Between* is a young woman struggling to make it in a big city.

Two other films that employ elements I also use are *Inside Out* and *Erika and Anju*. *Inside Out* is a 3D animated feature film by Pixar Animation Studios [Fig. 1]. The movie follows the story of a young girl named Riley as she moves to San Francisco. What was a great influence was how the personification of Riley's emotions as living creatures who control her drives the narrative of the movie. Riley's mind is represented as a control room run by the emotions Joy, Sadness, Fear, Disgust, and Anger. The emotions struggle to find common ground as they try to help Riley cope with her new life. Riley breaks down to her parents, admitting she misses her old life in Minnesota. This event shows Riley is a depressed young girl struggling to understand these emotions. Joy and Sadness work together, helping Riley adapt to her new life in San Francisco.<sup>4</sup> *Inside Out* is similar to *Forgotten Flora* because they address anxiety, but both films differ greatly in how they represent it. *Inside Out* focuses on depression since Sadness is a main

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<sup>4</sup> Internet Movie Database, *Inside Out*, directed by Pete Docter and Ronnie Del Carmen, Pixar Animation Studios, digital image, accessed December 7, 2016, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2096673/>.

character. *Forgotten Flora* leans more towards anxiety as its focus. In both films, emotions are personified, but there are significant differences between the emotion beings and a plant.

*Erika and Anju* is an animated, short film by Clara Host [Fig. 2]. *Erika and Anju* addresses stress in the form of intrusive thinking, specifically the mental obstacle posed by living in fear of terrible mishaps. In the film, Erika visits her girlfriend Anju at her apartment to make a nice, quiet dinner. We watch Erika as she journeys to Anju's apartment, and how along the way she experiences troubling, intrusive thoughts. These are shown as flashes in which the line work of the animation changes to black and white. In these flashes, she sees terrible events that could happen, but the likelihood is slim to none. For example, as she drives to Anju's apartment she envisions herself getting into a terrible car accident. As she cuts vegetables, she sees herself cutting her finger deeply and blood seeping onto the cutting board. Anju actually does hurt herself while performing a flag routine, and while Erika breaks down while dressing her wound, Anju explains she understands her worry. Anju calms Erika by accepting her fear, but lets her know nothing terrible will happen.<sup>5</sup> Again, both films deal with severe anxiety, but in different forms. Erika must manage intrusive thoughts and Megan must deal with ignoring her pressures. The presentation of stress in each film is very different; while in *Forgotten Flora* I utilize an overgrown plant as the culmination of overbearing difficulties, while *Erika and Anju* uses flashes of events that do not happen. *Forgotten Flora* shows anxiety as a real, manifested object, the plant, while *Erika and Anju* has imagined events. In both cases, the anxiety causes real problems for the main characters.

The films *Inside Out*, *Erika and Anju*, and *In Between* all tackled anxiety or depression as their main idea. It has been my experience that, though anxiety is rarely positive, it can drive

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<sup>5</sup> Clara Horst, *Erika and Anju* (video), posted April 23, 2016, accessed December 7, 2016, <https://vimeo.com/163963840>.

someone to make a change. Once I realized this idea was important to me, I realized I had not addressed this in my previous animations and I knew it was what I wanted to address in my thesis film. In *Forgotten Flora*, I placed Megan in a situation where she could not cope with her responsibility and over complicated daily tasks. This allowed me to address strain in a different way than any of the other films by addressing the repercussions of ignoring one's negative stress. Initially, Megan does not realize she is an overachiever in a negative way; she cannot stop from taking on her job's responsibilities as her own, and she relies on technology as a crutch to help her cope with these stressors in her life. I use her parents' gift of a simple plant as the event that forces her to learn to cope with her anxiety.

Anxiety is in many ways important to our everyday lives, and both drives us and impedes us. In regards to health, strain can be a driving force in productivity when it is positive. For example, in animation pressure can keep deadline dates in check and quality intact by reminding artists/animators about the urgency of completing a piece. While this kind of stress can still be detrimental to health in certain ways, the body can easily deal with it and recoup. Various aspects of life can cause detrimental stress, such as a family death or other traumatic events such as car accidents, hospital visits, etc. These events are not easy to cope with, and thus can cause harmful mental and physical health issues. Though anxiety can be both helpful and harmful, it is dependent on the person and how they cope with this tension. Alex Zautra, a clinical psychology professor at Arizona State University, advocates for the examination of positive and negative stress. Zautra believes both types of stress are important to an individual's mental health, and ignoring them can actual cause detrimental effects such as deep depression or severe anxiety.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Alex J. Zautra, *Emotions, Stress, and Health* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2003), 238.

Visually there are important elements to these ideas I have chosen to address in film. The contrast of a simplified life versus an over-complex life in the film represents the self-reflective critique of pressures in my life. I choose to represent this complexity through technology. The film does not seek to attribute technology as harmful or nature as the definite solution to stress, but rather explore if self-reflection is a necessary key to finding an alleviation from constant pressures. My main character's problem is represented visually in a few different ways. I was drawn to the work of television shows such as *Mission Hill* when studying cityscapes, particularly backgrounds drawn by artist Joseph Holt [Fig. 3]. The characters were whimsically drawn, but the backgrounds were drawn in skewed perspective. Making the perspective slightly skewed alludes to a slightly warped world.<sup>7</sup> This imagery inspired me for the look of the cityscape and for the main character Megan's living space as well.

Kate Beaton's drawing style [Fig. 4] heavily influenced how I drew the main character. Beaton simplifies her work into basic shapes and colors.<sup>8</sup> I am interested in the simplification of her work while retaining enough visual information for a simple, yet interesting style. I seek to do the same for my character in my film, coming full circle even in the character design to reflect upon the basic idea of the story. "In Between" has been a major influence on my film [Fig. 5]. The story addresses similar themes that I seek to address, such as anxiety. "In Between" uses the alligator as a metaphor, while I use the plant for Megan's over complex life and technology to represent her anxiety. I was inspired by "In Between" using a whimsical, well-meaning alligator as a personification of a mental obstacle. While the alligator just wants to play with the main

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph Holt, "Mission Hill Backgrounds," posted August 12, 2012, accessed October 14, 2016, <http://jholtmissionhill.blogspot.com/>.

<sup>8</sup> Kate, Beaton, "Marcel Duchamp's Breakfast," posted 2006, accessed October 14, 2016, <http://www.harkavagrant.com/index.php?id=1>.

character such as a pet would, this interruption in the main character's life is detrimental to her. She cannot accomplish simple tasks, when in reality, her anxiety will not let her accomplish these tasks. I wanted to use some kind of creature to personify Megan's anxiety in *Forgotten Flora* and decided upon a plant. This decision came from analyzing my character's life in the city in a boxy apartment. An overgrown plant would greatly change her usual, stressful surroundings.

Megan's odd predicament of facing off with an aggressive plant wrecking her usual routine turned out to be a dramatic way to alleviate her tensions. While over the top and comical, I wanted to show how nature could beneficially influence a strained life. How do our emotional states and age reflect upon how we deal with tension? I felt as though a dose of nature was always helpful to me personally, but I wanted to find out if others felt the same way.

There is research that states nature can be a relief from stress and a form of therapy. One article which illustrates this idea was "Healthy Workplaces: The Effects of Nature Contact at Work on Employee Stress and Health" by Lago-Wight, Chen, Dodd, and Weiler. This study very specifically examines the influence of exposing office workers to nature. The authors assessed the health of the staff both mentally and physically prior to and after their research. Independent and dependent variables were set with a numerical scale, called The Nature Contact Questionnaire, which measures the subject's health status at the time they were exposed to nature. This questionnaire measured these variables along with total stress levels, general health, and days of poor health. The authors rated the subjects based on their information. This all came into mind with what kind of nature contact they had, in the form of an independent variable and the dependent being health status. Ultimately, relief came in the form of outdoor break times, allowing people to step away from the office and enjoy greenery. The most successful break



times notably were not bleak, but instead featured a variety of foliage and break times. The information is very factual in understanding its limitations, but certainly leaning to the conclusion that direct nature contact was most influential in their subjects' recorded health history over a period of time. While the studies did not make them healthier physically, it seemed to keep stress levels down, which I force my character to do in the film. Participants reported to feel better when they took breaks outside, rather than being exposed to images of nature in their workspace.<sup>9</sup> The plant sitting in her apartment alone does not turn her anxiety on its head, but rather it seems to be an annoying reminder. Once it overtakes her apartment, the main character understands in the end this is what she needed after all, a "booster break" as the research in "Healthy Workplaces" suggests.

Kaplan's research in "The Role of Nature in the Context of the Workplace" focuses on finding ways of opening a space to allow sunlight and natural imagery into our daily lives. This is especially important for my film's narrative. Megan does not allow herself time to relax or time to "smell the roses." This pertains very much to the little interaction she has with sunlight, always leaving and going to work when it is dark outside. Unbeknownst to her, this increases her anxiety. Kaplan suggests with the addition of windows in a work space, this allows stress levels to decrease. Kaplan then goes to state any suggestion of the outside world is comforting to one's workplace pressures, even if there is little vegetation amongst many buildings.<sup>10</sup> There is a small

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<sup>9</sup> Erin Largo-Wight, W. William Chen, Virginia Dodd, and Robert Weiler, "Healthy Workplaces: The Effects of Nature Contact at Work on Employee Stress and Health," *Public Health Reports* 126 (2011): 129.

<sup>10</sup> Rachel Kaplan, "The Role of Nature in the Context of the Workplace," *Landscape and Urban Planning* 26 (1993): 199.

mention that exercise in the workplace is also important to keeping emotional health in check, but viewing nature is the best form for keeping attention spans on task.<sup>11</sup>

A study done in Sweden, “Nature-Based Stress Management Course for Individuals at Risk of Adverse Health Effects from Work-Related Stress- Effects on Stress Related Symptoms, Workability, and Sick Leave,” delved into stress related disorders to understand why Swedish people have been experiencing a higher rate of these disorders. It also asks what measures could be done to alleviate this. The study proved that with nature contact, people felt less burnt-out and overall sick leave decreased. Women became the main center of the study after the men dropped out for various reasons. This piqued my interest in relation to my character, as she is a female and somewhat a reflection of me. Each participant in the study was given a survey to measure their age, lifestyles, and stress levels. The authors conducted multiple studies by introducing participants to garden activities and nature education, latter consisting of nature walks with guides. The collected research data demonstrated an increase in the quality of sleep. Other important yet insubstantial reports were of a decrease in dizziness and headaches. Overall, the participants felt some relief from tension when given these nature-guided breaks.

With proven evidence that nature indeed can curb anxiety, some research by Jiang, Chang, and Sullivan has shown how women and men have differing reactions to nature-based stress management. “A Dose of Nature” analyzes more than the alleviation of things such as headaches, measuring variables such as salivary cortisol and skin conductance levels, clinically measurable physiological reactions to strain.<sup>12</sup> The authors showed subjects 3D nature simulations, testing for differences between male and female reactions to nature. They also

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<sup>11</sup> Kaplan, “The Role of Nature,” 200.

<sup>12</sup> B. Jiang et al., “A Dose of Nature: Tree Cover, Stress Reduction, and Gender Difference,” *Landscape and Urban Planning* 132 (2014): 26.

exposed the subjects to images of real, mid-western areas, specifically that of Indianapolis, St. Louis, Champaign-Urbana, and Springfield. All these areas had what the authors called tree cover, which refers the amount of tree density in a living space.<sup>13</sup> This interested me greatly, given my specific upbringing in the Midwest and its influence on my film. The research found strong tree density to be a factor in men's health, but oddly not women's. Women had such a different biological reaction from that of men that the results almost seemed to prove nothing for their tree-density interaction. Specific levels of oxytocin and low levels of vasopressin curbed these results.<sup>14</sup> The study seems to prove 3D simulations were not great predictor than the real deal, thus perhaps leaving more hope in these tests for measuring women's reactions. For my film, this research helped prove that Megan's direct contact with nature could actually help her feel less stressed. Megan lives in the big city, which is not detrimental in itself, but for her particular situation it is harmful to her mental and physical health. This is because Megan does not allow herself time enjoy any kind of interaction with the outdoors. It is implied Megan does not spend time outside much, even further does not spend time outside of her workplace. She does give any time to herself to unwind for her life is her work in a negative way. The contact with the plant signifies an escape for Megan in an unexpected way, even though it is forceful. Since Megan does not have much contact with nature in the city, the plant's intrusion is a surprise to her. Ultimately this helps her become less anxious by disrupting her reliance on her overbearing work.

In "Healthy Nature Healthy People: 'Contact with Nature' as an Upstream Health Promotion Intervention for Populations," the authors prove nature alleviates stress, stating that people already know and seek out these kinds of spaces while living in urban areas, such as parks

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<sup>13</sup> Jiang et al., "A Dose of Nature," 28.

<sup>14</sup> Jiang et al., "A Dose of Nature," 33.

in a big city. The research studies how humans have gone farther from nature in these specific environments and how they make amends with that in the wake of mental illness and ill health. While my main character deals with office-related pressure, the research in “Healthy Nature, Healthy People,” examined patients recovering from gall bladder surgery and how their healing rates increased with direct contact with nature.<sup>15</sup> The research goes on to state the proof has already existed, but health promotion agencies and communities are beginning to recognize these benefits and starting to implement them more. While perhaps more of a review, this research proves that populations have begun to recognize nature’s effects on our wellbeing. The study is important to my film since it examines many people as a population. This proves that not only can someone like Megan in *Forgotten Flora* benefit from nature, but everyone could.

While it is of utmost importance to study human interaction with nature in relation to stress for my character, Falkenberg’s *Interior Gardens: Designing and Constructing Green Spaces in Private and Public Buildings*, a study about garden spaces in buildings, provides a detailed look at how we construct green spaces in our architecture. Falkenberg does not seek to comment on our emotional state in relation to these green spaces, but rather to break down what spaces work well and what kinds of plants these spaces have for large buildings. This research pertains mainly to Megan’s apartment after the plant has taken it over and changed it for the better. Falkenberg’s loft apartment is a great concept for not only my story but acts as a great visual reference from real life for my film. The skyline of the city can be seen in the background, but the green space overtakes most of the courtyard of the loft apartment.<sup>16</sup> Megan’s

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<sup>15</sup> Cecily Maller et al., “Healthy Nature Healthy People: ‘Contact with Nature’ as an Upstream Health Promotion Intervention for Populations,” *Healthy Promotion International* 21 (2005): 47.

<sup>16</sup> Haike Falkenberg, *Interior Gardens: Designing and Constructing Green Spaces in Private and Public Buildings* (Basel: Birkenhauser, 2011), 74.

environment in *Forgotten Flora* is mainly the city, and she has no interaction with a green space. The apartment is void of much color as well. The nature serves as a different form of space for Megan, a break from her mundane day-to-day tasks.

Jonathan Samer and John D. Spengler study the influence of indoor environments on human health.<sup>17</sup> While Samer and Spengler do not focus on stress directly, they seek to study what kinds of environments are bad for our health. For example, air pollutants in the 1950s were a huge problem to human health based on our current knowledge of how detrimental these pollutants are. These studies go further to analyze what our buildings are made of today and what pollutants do specific materials give off which can be harmful to humans in too many doses. Samer and Spengler's influence on my film relates directly to the kind of living space the character takes up in the film. As with the skewed perspective of the cityscape, the buildings and apartment itself can seem menacing in its own way once you realize these are places for tension to cultivate. The plant breaking free from the apartment does away with just that, whether her strain is perhaps an emotional issue rather than affected by her material surroundings. It's hinted that the girl did not indeed grow up in this city environment, and brings into question whether she has successfully adapted to it or not.

While my main character does not work in an industrial setting, the research done on an individual's reaction to certain stressors in "Industrial Relations Stress and Job Satisfaction: Concurrent Effects and Mediation" is important to my film. Certain difficult events were measured on a zero to fifteen scale, as well as specific demographics.<sup>18</sup> Simply put, the study

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<sup>17</sup> Jonathan M. Samer and John D. Spengler, "Indoor Environments and Health," *American Journal of Public Health* 93 (2003): 1489- 1493.

<sup>18</sup> Kevin E. Kelloway et al., "Industrial Relations Stress and Job Satisfaction: Concurrent Effects and Mediation," *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 14 (1993): 450.

analyzed positive and negative moods on job satisfaction. Positive and negative moods had direct and indirect results on job satisfaction, while negative moods always brought about a negative reaction to job satisfaction.<sup>19</sup> This means mood was not the sole reason job satisfaction was down. Emotional support was a key factor left out of their model, stating most of the factors resulting in low job satisfaction rested on their involvement in daily activities. While my main character seems to not relate to these industrial effects, her mood is a direct cause of her job satisfaction.

Quality of life can mean something different to people from different walks of life. One thing is for certain, *Biodiversity Change and Human Health: From Ecosystem Services to Spread of Disease*'s research states that all human life must interact with a bio-diverse environment, one heavily surrounded by nature. They went further in their research and analyzed why people find nature important in their environment, and what exactly makes them want to keep it from failing. My story does not start with this idea, but the main character understands the importance of her surroundings by the end of the film. While her environment is not extremely bio-diverse, the importance of natural diversity becomes part of her realization about how to cope with her stress. The study states that harnessing our current bio-diverse resources enables us to reduce disease, both mental and physical. Humans must take a strong stance on preserving these things, though population growth may make this difficult. This research adds variety to my film in the sense that humans must be proactive in preserving their environment for their health, which my main character realizes. Megan synthesizes what she has learned throughout my film by accepting the plant as a part of her apartment, in this way preserving her experience and new relationship with nature.

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<sup>19</sup> Kelloway et al., "Industrial Relations," 450.

On the subject of the main character's emotional state, Moshe Zeidner examines how our emotional intelligence affects different aspects of our life. Specifically Zeidner discusses "Work and Emotional Intelligence" and "Emotional Intelligence and the Toxic Work Environment." These subjects pertain to Megan, and it struck me as how important they were for my research into this character and her life. Work environments differ, but regardless of the circumstances, stress and anxiety seem to creep into our work, overtaking our lives. This is exactly what happens to Megan. Zeidner coins Emotional Intelligence as EI, and in his chapter "Work and Emotional Intelligence," he delves into how organizations are rapidly changing due to new technologies and thus creating new pressures on the worker. While Megan is not new to technology, she has let it overtake her day-to-day activities, allowing it to control everything she does. Zeidner points out that, in the Western world, our emotional states at work influence all aspects of our lives such as self-esteem, income, and social status.<sup>20</sup> Zeidner also states having strong EI allows you to gauge the emotions of others at work, allowing higher success in offices and groups. My character Megan cannot gauge her own EI, therefore she turns a blind eye on perhaps any social interaction at all.<sup>21</sup>

*Forgotten Flora* reflects these studies with Megan's predicament of too much anxiety in her life. Many of these studies, such as "A Dose of Nature" and "Healthy Workplaces," exemplify how exposure to nature does in fact help our physical and mental health. Contact with nature contact alleviates stress in the workplace, hospital, or everyday life, and reduces things such as headaches and physical fatigue. Contact with nature increases positive attitudes, adding a level of mental peace. Workers who were actively engaged with nature through activities such as

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<sup>20</sup> Moshe Zeidner, *What We Know About Emotional Intelligence: How It Affects Learning, Work, Relationships, and Our Mental Health* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2009), 256-257.

<sup>21</sup> Zeidner, *What We Know About Emotional Intelligence*, 265.

gardening felt more accomplished and at peace with themselves. This is a result of the activity being fun and relaxing. *Forgotten Flora* utilizes all these ideas in relation to Megan and her work life. Megan does not allow herself to enjoy extracurricular activities or breaks from her work, for when she arrives home, she goes straight to bed. This consistent routine causes more strain in Megan's life, but as she begins to accept time away from work as an alternative, she realizes she has been missing anything leisure in her life. The studies prove this kind of positive influence on our lives makes us happier mentally and physically.

### **DESCRIPTION OF *FORGOTTEN FLORA***

My short film focuses on Megan, a hard-working overachiever in an extremely stressful job. Megan has worked hard to find herself in an executive position, but unfortunately this comes with a huge amount of responsibility. The company relies heavily on her. Megan spends most of her time in the office as opposed to her apartment [Fig. 6]. Her high-tech apartment is connected directly to her phone, as is everything else in her life. Megan is not able to work decent hours, which falls mainly on her for not addressing this stress as work. Every time Megan travels to and from work, her tension rises. Megan receives a plant from her parents as a gift, which they must leave in front of her door since they are never able to get a hold of her [Fig. 7]. She takes it into her house, setting it in front of a childhood photo, which clues the audience that something is missing in her life, primarily free time and any kind of social interaction [Fig. 8].

The plant's growth drives the narrative; as the plant grows, Megan's life becomes less complicated. I show this by having Megan receive texts and calls from her parents and work, but having her always answer work first, choosing to put more pressure on herself by going back to



work as soon as she arrives home. The plant grows out of control, takes Megan's phone, and destroys it [Fig. 9 and Fig. 10]. Megan crawls out on to the plant's limb in an effort to retrieve her phone, but in the process almost plummets to her demise [Fig. 11]. As she clings to a vine, she begins to swing back and forth, and suddenly remembers her childhood memory of how she would swing on a swing set [Fig. 12]. The viewer realizes this is the memory captured in the family photo beside which she initially placed the plant. The synthesis comes when we see Megan in her office, which has become like a jungle, full of plants symbolizing her acceptance of her newly stress-free life [Fig. 13].

The film is just under five minutes, focusing on personal reflection in the midst of high anxiety. *Forgotten Flora* is a hand drawn, 2D animation with painted backgrounds. These backgrounds break down the environment into basic shapes and colors with warped perspective, alluding to something amiss in Megan's life. With the story elements, animation, and background paintings, I have addressed and explored what is, for me, a new but important subject, specifically anxiety and personal reflection. The subject of this film is both personal and important for me as an animator because I experience anxiety. My anxiety has been a huge part of my life in both positive and negative ways, and I wanted to make an animated film addressing how a person can learn to cope with it.

## CONCLUSION

*Forgotten Flora* explores the effect of anxiety on a person trapped in a burdened, over-complicated, technological-reliant life, ultimately finding peace when she learns to cope with her anxiety by returning to a simpler lifestyle. The film does not seek to question whether technology

is helpful or harmful overall, but rather explores how over-reliance on technology can be detrimental, causing too much pressure and stunting personal growth. Technology can be helpful, but as in the case of the main character of my film, we can easily abuse it. Since Megan becomes heavily reliant on technology for simple things like getting up in the morning, she begins to miss out on actually living. I have shown nature as the opposite of this. As the plant grows out of control, it disrupts her normal activities and literally uproots her life. The plant grows more as her stress grows, and there is no explanation for why this occurs, but this growth drives the narrative. It allows Megan to realize the plant is not harming her, but rather is forcing her to make needed changes in her life. Megan has fallen into a rut that many people easily fall into, one in which we allow our day-to-day activities to become more difficult. Though the film addresses the conflict between the ideas of technology versus nature, its main point is to address the benefits of having a simple life in contrast to an unnecessarily complex one. Other films have addressed anxiety, but *Forgotten Flora* is a personal story told in a modern setting with a contemporary narrative. Megan's reliance on her phone and technology addresses common issues I believe young people experience today. Creating *Forgotten Flora* has been a valuable experience for me as an animator, and I hope it accomplishes my goal of encouraging viewers to question the stress in their own lives.

## **EXHIBITION STATEMENT**

My short film focuses on Megan, a hard-working overachiever in an extremely stressful job, who must grapple with intense anxiety in the form of an overgrown plant. Her high-tech apartment is connected directly to her phone, as is everything else in her life. Megan is gifted this plant by her parents. The plant's growth drives the narrative; as the plant grows, Megan's life

becomes less strained. The film is just under five minutes, and focuses on personal reflection in the midst of overbearing strain. The film is a 2D, digital animation with painted backgrounds, and the techniques are traditional in the sense that the film is hand drawn. These backgrounds break down the environment into basic shapes and colors with warped perspective, alluding to something amiss in Megan's life. I examine the subject of anxiety and personal reflection through storytelling. This subject is personal to me as I have anxiety, and I want to explore a subject that is serious instead of comedic, because of the seriousness of anxiety disorders. In order to combine all these elements together, I employ the Adobe Creative Cloud Suite with Flash, After Effects, and Photoshop. These programs allow me to hand draw the animation and still use digital resources to complete the production, a connection with my work that has always been important to me.

I do not seek to question whether all stress is negative, or if urban living is detrimental to human life. Instead, I urge for personal reflection into what makes us troubled with a very specific setting and character, Megan. Unchecked strain can lead to an over-complex life just as my character illustrates. While her tension seems to solidify her success in her workplace, she does not realize it costs her personal growth and the ability to relax in her living space. The stress from work manifests itself as the plant's growth, abruptly reminding her to snap out of her overbearing routine and simplify her life. Note this does not question her status in her office or her work, but rather her job satisfaction as a reflection on her mood. The direct contact with nature is an underlying message I believe in; more interaction with it can aid us in stress relief, clearing our mind and alleviating our life from too much complexity. My main character's life is characterized by her work, which she perceives to be necessarily difficult. As she enjoys her work, she does not realize tension has begun to weigh on her heavily. A simple gift of a plant

from her parents feeds on her stress. As her pressures grow, the plant grows out of control. This relationship between the character and nature serves as a means to illustrate nature's influence on our emotional state.

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